

Glimpsing God
Exodus 33:12-23
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I've shared with you before that I'm notorious within my family for present-guessing. I can almost always figure out what gift I'm getting, and I have a variety of techniques that would make CIA operative envious: stealth closet-sneaking, super-sensitive present-shaking, and the old reliable, intense interrogation of the present-giver. "Kory, I bought you something at the store today." "Sniff, sniff...smells like a light blue button-up dress shirt." Just last week Leigh told me she had bought a present for the girls and me and wasn't going to tell me what it was until it arrived a week later. She told me this on Thursday afternoon; by the next morning, I knew what it was.

Behind my curiosity is a desire to know, and that desire goes far deeper than just presents. In fact, I believe ingrained in our human DNA is a fear of the unknown and a desire to eliminate that unknown by knowing more. We see that in Moses in today's passage. As Moses continues to lead the Israelites toward the Promised Land, he pauses to have this frank conversation with God. In fact, Moses gets a bit uppity. "Look, God, you keep saying you are taking us to a land flowing with milk and honey, but I'm not convinced. How do I know this is true?" In fact, a more literal translation of the Hebrew says, "You have not let me know. You said, 'I know.' Show me that I may know." We are embedded with a desire to know.

Moses then says to God, "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you." The biblical translation The Message says it this way: "If I am special to you, let me in on your plans." The curiosity gene strikes again.

If I had a nickel for everyone someone said to me, "I just wish I knew God's plan," we wouldn't need a Stewardship Campaign. In fact, I've said that many times myself. If only I could skip ahead and read the end of the story. If only I knew that if I step inside this darkness there will be light at the other end. God, you keep promising me a gift; can't I get just get a sneak peek first?

"If you love me, if I am special to you, let me in on your plans." Of course, that implies that if God doesn't let us in on the plan, then God doesn't love us, which we know is not true. Sometimes God's plan is simply not understandable by us. That doesn't stop us from asking or being frustrated when God doesn't play the game our way, but it's the truth we hear over and over again in scripture: The Lord says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."

I've been in the dark enough in my life to know this is true. So many times I was sure I knew exactly what God's plan was for me, only to find out that God had something infinitely better in mind. Have you experienced that? A circumstance comes along – a death, a health issue, a relationship crisis, a time of transition – and you're just sure you know how things are going to work out or not work out, and then God reaches in and brings joy out of despair and hope out of hopelessness, or at least gives you the strength to put one foot in front of the other. We are not supposed to understand God's ways, only trust in them.

Which makes Moses' request not just bold but foolhardy. So imagine the surprise when God actually acquiesces to Moses' request: "I will do the very thing you have asked because I am pleased with you and know you by name." Psalm 103 says of God, "He made his way known to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel." Why does God let Moses in? What did Moses do to get a sneak peek, a glimpse of God?

I have to think that the nature of Moses' request led to God's action. Moses didn't test or challenge God, something I think we are all guilty of at some point in our lives. "God, if you'll just heal me, then I'll believe." "God, if you get me out of this, I promise to do better next time." "God, if you'll just give me a sign, I'll be your faithful follower forever."

Most of us would prefer to see God perform mighty miracles rather than have fellowship with God and learn God's ways. It would have been easier to ask for a miracle. Moses could have said, "Beam us up to the Promised Land" or "Can you provide some jars of peanut butter to go with our manna?" Instead, he simply says, "Teach me your ways." Don't miraculously heal me; show me how to glorify you through this illness. Don't magically make life better; show me how to live faithfully in the midst of this trial. How would our relationship with God be different if we prayed not for mighty miracles but for a deeper relationship?

The relationship Moses shared with God must have led to Moses' next request. "Show me your glory." Moses must have thought, "Well, I've come this far. If I'm going to ask for something, I might as well make it big." The common belief in Moses' time was that God's presence was so glorious that no human being could see it and live. You would be awed to death!

Once again, God agrees. Sort of. God puts Moses in a cleft in the rock and passes by so that Moses can see God, but only from behind. What does Moses actually see here? We often give God human characteristics – it's called anthropomorphizing – but I don't think Moses experienced a divine mooning here. What he did experience was a deepening of his relationship with God. This is not the burning bush, which aroused his curiosity. This is not a series of plagues, which put the fear of God in him. This is not the parting of the sea or the giving of manna from heaven. This is God revealing himself to Moses.

No fair! I want that. I want to see what Moses saw. I may not be lugging around a couple million Israelites, I might not be able to even part the water in my bathtub, but I have my own burdens, I also need a pep talk from the Coach every now and then. I want the supernatural experience. I want the booming voice and the pillar of fire. I don't want to trust all the time; sometimes I want to know.

I think Paul must have struggled with this same question, but he seems to have come to a peace with the lack of an answer. We know I Corinthians 13 as the "Love Chapter," but in it is this intriguing verse: "Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." How interesting that I am fixated on what I need to know, which has caused me to forget that what's important is not what I know, but that I am known. Just as God knows Moses by name, God knows us by name. The fact that we are known is all we need to know, because it means that as we strive to follow God, God is with us. What are you going through? God knows. You are known.

If we doubt that, we can look at this story as an example. By following God, Moses is given a glimpse of God's glory. We may not be able to see God's face – even

Moses wasn't allowed that privilege – but we can see God's back. We can see where God has been, what God has done, how God has left a mark in this world. As I look back on my life, especially at the difficult times or the moments of crossroads, I can now see that God was there with me. I couldn't see it then, but looking back, I can see it now. God was there. And if God was there, that must mean God is here, now. It may not feel like it; we may not be as privy to the plans as we would like. But God is with us.

In Jewish tradition, it was customary for students of a rabbi, the master teacher, to follow the rabbi around, soaking in all that the rabbi had to say. They would follow closely on the rabbi's heels for the entire day as the rabbi walked down dusty roads. By the end of the day, the students would have dust all over them from living in the rabbi's wake.

Our goal, as Christians, is to be covered in the dust of our rabbi, to follow Jesus so closely that our lives are saturated with his teachings, his will, his love. Here's one of the paradoxes of faith: The more we strive to connect, the more we ask God to teach us God's ways, the more we pray for a deeper relationship with Christ, the more we *may* know, but the more we *will be* known.

What is your deepest desire? What do you want more than anything? When our deepest desire is not money or power, not miracles or good health, but to know God, we cross a line. We enter into a level of intimacy. We allow ourselves to be covered in the dust of the rabbi. And we reflect, albeit it imperfectly, the glory of God is this world. You know, I said earlier that we aren't able to see God's face. But I may be wrong there. Because my prayer is that when people look at you, at the way you live your life and weather your storms and remain faithful in your crises, they will see God's glory revealed.